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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the portrayal of shopping malls in the films of the 1980s and attempts to "narrativize" the trend found between the films as the story of a subculture as it adopts and develops a belief system based on consumerism. The paper begins with an exploration of the evolution of the mall as a modern meeting place and center of social activity, particularly for teenagers. It discusses some of the films that focus on the lives of teens who spend much of their time at malls, including "Fast Times at Ridgemont High," "Valley Girl," "Can't Buy Me Love," "Night of the Comet," "Chopping Mall," "Phantom of the Mall," and "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure." The paper first examines the ways the mall's message of consumerism is shown infiltrating the lifestyle of the 1980s teenager through the extension and development of the "shopping mall high school" analogy, especially in mall montages. Next, the paper considers the films' more intimate psychological "appeals" to the teens in the form of "unlimited shopping" and predatory fantasy sequences, which suggest that the "consumerist discourse" of the dominant culture has successfully begun to exploit teen insecurities and desires. Finally, the paper examines how, by the end of the decade, mall "consumerism" is showing up in the way teens form relationships with each other, in particular showing how the construction of male-female relationships and high school "cliques" in "Can't Buy Me Love" is founded upon consumerist values. Fourteen references are attached. (SG)

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THE SHOPPING MALL: FILM

CHRONOTOPE OF THE 1980S

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"Shopping centres and particularly malls with their controlled environment certainly have become much more than retailing facilities. They are frequently important focal points in communities for cultural and entertainment activities . . . They also tend to display a striking sameness across the country in design and tenant composition, thus creating a condition not unlike what some observers of the landscape have referred to as the McDonaldization of America."

--Lord, p. 211

"The shopping mall has replaced the town square as the center of many American cities. Shopping itself has become the activity that brings people together."

--David Byrne in True Stories

Inside and outside of the movies, the shopping mall provided social commentators with one of their most enduring metaphors for American society in the 1980s.

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Originally, city managers and planners had hoped that the mall could provide the answers to a wide range of social problems--in the form of the "festival marketplace," for instance, the mall might help to restore the "village" atmosphere of historic areas. As the new "town squares" and centers of activities for suburban communities, malls might help to arrest the centrifugal housing sprawls that had continued since the war boom. As safe pedestrian havens pocketed within the troubled cities of the late 70s, the mall might assist in the restoration of the financial integrity of these communities by allowing spending to occur where it was most needed. The number of malls in the United States and the amount of mall floorspace per capita increased dramatically in the late 60s and 70s as a result (Lord 210-3).

By 1984, according to one survey, Americans were spending more time in malls than anywhere else--except for their homes, workplaces, or schools (Kowinski 22). At the same time, the expansion of mall services into so many different human and community service sectors simultaneously enchanted and troubled social commentators such as William Kowinski:

You can get anything from diamonds to yoghurt in the mall; you can attend college classes, register to vote, go to the library, see topless dancers and male strippers, give blood, bet, score, jog and meditate, and get a room or a condo and live there. Someday it may be possible--if it isn't already--to be born, go from preschool through college, get a job, date, marry, have

children, fool around, get a divorce, advance through a career or two, receive your medical care, even get arrested, tried, and jailed; live a relatively full life of culture and entertainment, and eventually die and be given funeral rites without ever leaving a particular mall complex--because every one of those possibilities exists now in some shopping center somewhere (21-2).

For Kowinski and others, the mall locale presented a grim vision of Reagan Era America, a separate and in some ways Orwellian¹ world, distinguished by its qualities of being an "enclosed," "protected" space, "controlled" by its own consumerist practices (60). Kowinski's book contains chapters on the lulling effect of the mall environment upon shoppers, who lose their sense of time (a sense-deprivation effect he refers to as the "zombie effect," probably in deference to George Romero's 1979 film Dawn of the Dead);² on the mall's "imprisonment" of teen workers; and on the mall's effects upon teenagers in general, who were growing up "controlled" by using the mall as their hangout. According to Kowinski, these teens exhibited the characteristic qualities of being programmed to consume, easily bored, shallowly obsessed with their wardrobes, and "hurried"--i.e., forced to become adults before their time.

Two events of 1985 help to establish this year as a

¹ One of Kowinski's chapters on the legal debates over the control of the mall's "public space" is entitled "From Petition to Emotion: Big Brother Is Managing You."

² Kowinski refers to this film as the "definitive mall work."

highwater mark of concern over the mall's impact upon its most successful citizen, the teenager. The first is the publication of Kowinski's book The Malling of America; the second, the publication of a study of suburban schools entitled The Shopping Mall High School. This study suggested several applications of the "enclosed world" model of the shopping mall for understanding the way high school students across the country were being "sold" on education. The researchers found that the schools were "enticing" students to attend classes or to remain in school by offering increasingly diverse classes and activities; "accommodating" the curriculum to the students by offering easier courses that could be substituted for required courses; oversimplifying classroom tasks; and trying hard to please parents and school boards by continually allowing the freedom of "choice" to override sound pedagogical practice. The publication of The Shopping Mall High School seems to bear out Kowinski's assertion that the mall had become a kind of extension of the "large suburban schools--only there's Karmelkorn instead of chem lab, the ice rink instead of the gym: It's high school without the impertinence of classes" (353). But its authors combat the assumption that good educators are merely successful salespeople by describing the "neutrality" that results in students when they were not pressed to "choose wisely" from their curriculum menus or to "engage deeply" with their subjects.

In retrospect, it is not clear whether The Shopping Mall High School is a case of educators providing a metaphor for Hollywood or vice versa, since the first footnote in the book references a

popular 1982 film, Fast Times at Ridgemont High (hereafter Fast Times) that had seized the imagination of its reviewers by first suggesting the high school-shopping mall analogy. The question of the media's impact upon society is of course not reducible to anything approaching a causal relationship in this case. Like some of the later Hollywood movies that would peer into the shopping mall subculture, Fast Times' reputation rested in large part on its claims to be a "study." It had been based on a book and screenplay by Cameron Crowe, who had spent a year gathering fieldnotes while "masquerading" as a high school student. In the process, according to Janet Maslin in her New York Times review entitled "Shopping Mall Blues" (9/3/82), Crowe succeeded in "making some very funny, believable notes on how his new friends really felt and sounded."

It is possible to detect a similar attention to the nuances of "Valley" speech and mannerisms in the representations of high schoolers in "mall" films to follow Fast Times, such as Valley Girl (1983) or Can't Buy Me Love (1987). The use of mall locales in several Hollywood movies, as I hope to show, typically references a "real" social space, and the films provide us with data about the forms of interaction between teens, making them useful tools for social historians of the media.

Although the possible intersections of "mall" research with media studies are many,³ this chapter will focus on films that

³ Kowinski's study suggests at least ten possible areas of application, I think: (1) the phenomenon of the movement of the theatre to the mall cineplex; (2) the similar spectatorial effects of the "fantasy environments" created by the mall and the movies; (3) direct links to show business often found in the malls--movie

actually made use of mall settings. In addition to Fast Times (1982) and Valley Girl (1983), I will consider the following films of the decade in this chapter: Night of the Comet (1984), Weird Science (1985), Chopping Mall (1986), Can't Buy Me Love (1987), Phantom of the Mall (1988), and Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989). Most of these films were targeted towards teen audiences, and consequently gravitate towards either the comedy/drama or science fiction/horror poles. Once again, the relevance of cultivating genre distinctions between film texts like these is questionable, however; the movies are often more interested in parodying each other than in keeping formal boundaries pristine. Chopping Mall, for instance, is a splendid example of a film with an identity crisis. It was alternately titled R.O.B.O.T. and originally released as Killbots, suggesting a sci-fi thriller, but it seems likely that the success of George Romero's Dawn of the Dead (1979, usually listed as "horror") and Night of the Comet (usually listed as "sci-fi"), both films that had made memorable use of mall settings and zombies, prompted the name-change to

promotions, "Hollywood on Tour" exhibits, etc.; (4) an industrial study of the mall as the place where a movie's licensed tie-in products are sold, particularly, rock music soundtracks geared to a 12-24 year old market; (5) tie-in sales with other products: videos, books based on movies, products seen in movies, etc.; (6) movies that seem "designed to sell in malls" by appealing to the "suburban sensibility"--Kowinski's examples are E.T., Poltergeist, and Star Wars; (7) movies which present visions of similar "controlled environments" and feudal orders; (8) science fiction films, in particular films that feature space stations and space ships patterned after malls (Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Aliens); (9) movies that present visions of future utopias and dystopias; and finally (10), movies that feature malls as actual settings.

Chopping Mall. The movie also featured a cast of "star" personalities who were "recreating their roles" in popular teen movies such as Eating Raoul, Friday the 13th, Re-Animator, and A Bucket of Blood, resulting in a further blend; consequently, the Variety reviewer of the film dismissed it as being a pastiche of "cameos and in-jokes." Furthermore, Kelli Maroney, the film's main star, was appearing here in her third "shopping mall" movie after Valley Girl (comedy/drama) and Night of the Comet along with Mary Woronov, her co-star in the latter film.

The "Valley" accents and reactions of mall subculture members like Maroney had become such an in-joke in both the comedies and thrillers that even when the characters had to make "hard" decisions about their lives, or found themselves in deadly peril, neither filmmakers nor the critics seemed to care whether or not the dramatic tension was sustained. Consider this enthusiastic Variety review of Night of the Comet:

Much of the film is played straight, including several effective special makeup effects scares, but what makes the picture work is a light-hearted approach, typified by the reaction of one of the heroines during a suspenseful, dangerous last reel scene: suddenly reunited with her sister, she exclaims: "what a great outfit," a non sequitur that is perfectly in character (13).

Significantly, reviewers of the other films to follow, such as Chopping Mall or Phantom of the Mall, took them to task for losing their sense of humor, for not consistently

maintaining the campy manner of Night of the Comet and 50s sci-fi. The result is that these movies, while beginning at the horror/sci-fi pole, tend to gravitate towards the comic, and we have a kind of generic heteroglossia, a mixed bag of intentions that cannot simply be attributed to the films' uneven quality. Conversely, films like Weird Science and Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure, which start at the other pole of comedy/drama, employ a great deal of science fiction pyrotechnics and crank up the musical soundtrack to achieve a polyglot "formula" that will work on teens. I conclude that the overlap across genres in the films I will discuss makes a more conventional reading pointless to force, and also fails to account for a substantial intertextuality.

Perhaps the most important distinguishing characteristic here, beyond considerations of "genre" or "plot," is the influence that appears to be exerted upon characters by the mall setting itself.⁴ To use Bakhtin's term, the mall setting appears to function "chronotopically" throughout the movies by creating a fictional world that continually references a "real," dynamic social space, and the result is that a continuity in commentary upon the subculture is achieved across the decade.

My purpose in the present essay is primarily a descriptive one. I intend to lay some of the groundwork here for a broader study of shopping mall films and teen movies of the 1980s. This necessitates my stating the case for the indoctrination of

⁴ Fast Times, Valley Girl, Chopping Mall, and The Phantom of the Mall all shared a common shooting location, the Sherman Oaks Galleria in Sherman Oaks, California.

teenagers into a "religion of consumerism" as fully as space will allow me, or so I believe.

There is also an undercurrent of "resistance" to this dominant paradigm that merits further study, and textual evidence which suggests that the "religion of consumerism" has begun to lose its grip upon the teen subculture by the end of the decade. Like John Fiske (in his books Understanding Popular Culture and Reading the Popular, both 1989), what I find most interesting from a theoretical standpoint about the shopping mall movies are the "patterns of resistance" that invariably show up in them, leaving the characters' and subculture's consumerist *raison d'être* streaked with contradictions. For example, there is the rather Euripidean sense of closure we find in several films (Valley Girl, Night of the Comet, and especially, Can't Buy Me Love): the "controlled" characters who play leads in these films only seem capable of temporary gestures away from consumerist values, and after making these, are left with no energy for further rehabilitation. Other significant patterns of "resistance" begin to emerge in the films as well--perhaps most importantly, the motif of the mall "control room" expose, in which sinister adults are shown exploiting teenagers and other shoppers (in Night of the Comet, Chopping Mall, and especially, Phantom of the Mall). It is not feasible to elaborate upon these patterns of resistance, however, without first trying to define the central controlling paradigms that are being "resisted." Accordingly, the trend that I will be "narrativizing" between the above films is the story of

a subculture as it adopts and develops a belief system founded upon consumerism.

Fiske clearly underestimates the scope of the "religion of consumerism" case made by social commentators of the 1980s such as Kowinski. He detects patterns of passive "resistance" in the activities of a group of Australian teens who attended the shopping mall "cathedral" while rarely spending money there, or who frequently browsed without buying (Reading the Popular 13-18). But neither of these behaviors steals the fire from Kowinski's testimony to the mall's addictive environmental influence. It is not clear to me what kind of ground Fiske hopes to gain for mall studies by renaming a socially conditioned habit such as passive "browsing" a form of "resistance" (because it does not usually climax in a purchase) without consideration of effects: whether this highly patterned behavior constitutes a "rehearsal" for later consuming, for instance; or whether it shapes or shortens a teenager's attention span, and may be related to other psychological phenomena such as video "channel switching." By privileging the climactic, but relatively unimportant "purchase" in the transaction rather than upon the way consumerism has been said to permeate our ways of perceiving the world and to shape our attitudes, self-image, gender relationships, and values, the arguments that Fiske presents in support of his "strategies of resistance" never really engage with the "religion of consumerism" metaphor that he would have us rethink.

Furthermore, Fiske's inclination is to glorify the 1980s teens

as though they were society's rebels, and to ennoble the characteristic groupiness and iconoclasm of adolescence as illustrative of his own critical agenda.⁵ This tendency ultimately seems nostalgic, at best, if it is taken to apply to teen subcultures in the United States as well as in Australia. On the contrary, the extent to which the shopping mall subculture of the 1980s is thought to have participated in, and actually help to define some of the forms of behavior we have come to associate with the Reagan Era in this country is a basic assumption of my own analysis.⁶ I wish to acknowledge, and to treat as "mainstream" rather than "marginal" here, the clear and direct influence teens exerted over the Hollywood film industry during the decade, upon

⁵ There is an unfortunate unevenness in Fiske's treatment of female shopping (18-24). Whereas Fiske finds comparatively direct patterns of resistance to the dominant culture in the teens' abstinence from shopping, "female shopping" is considered "subversive" more generally in that it enables women to cross over from the domestic sphere into the public, to "make do with what they have." One may well wonder just how "subversive" an activity going out in public is these days for women, especially since mall planners and owners frequently assume that the typical shopper is a "she" (e.g., cf. Maitland 26). The problem is that Fiske treats turn-of-the-century feminist speeches, midcentury rhetoric about the liberating power of appliances, and current t-shirt slogans as essentially "female utterances," all of a piece, without bothering to "situate" these utterances in time and place--to take soundings of the distinct historical conflicts or conditions under which they have been produced. This problem runs through both of Fiske's books and, I believe, severely limits their usefulness as social history.

⁶ To quote a popular phrase of the 1980s that reflects the continuity between adolescent and adult aspirations in the era well: "Whoever dies with the most toys, wins."

the merchant profile of the average shopping mall,⁷ and ultimately, upon United States "popular culture" as well.

The Consumerist Prerequisite

"This is the closest shopping arcade. But the whole area is an absolute monument to consumerism."

--scientist in Night of the Comet

"This is the San Dimas Mall. And this is where people of today's world hang out."

--Bill in Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure

When one visualizes a shopping mall, the picture that emerges is probably not too unlike the Sherman Oaks Galleria in California, the site of Fast Times, Valley Girl, Chopping Mall, and The Phantom of the Mall. Large department or "magnet" stores are usually

⁷ Kowinski notes that the popularity of the mall with suburban teens was not a phenomenon that mall designers had originally planned for. The International Council of Shopping Centers (I.C.S.C.) commissioned a study as a result (for which no date is given), complete with a guide to mall managers on "how to handle the teenage incursion" (350). The study found that suburban teenagers were coming to the mall out of boredom, and although they seemed to spend more time "fighting, drinking, littering, and walking" than other teens, they actually presented fewer problems of control. These teens typically "congregated in groups of two to four and predominantly at locations selected by them rather than the management;" i.e., in main pedestrian walkways and mall atriums. Kowinski proposes that this problem of teen congestion was an important cause for the installation of video arcades into the mall, which were designed to convert the teens into proper consumer-citizens. The I.C.S.C. report concluded that containing the teens could be tremendously profitable to mall owners, because "The vast majority [of teens] support the same set of values as does shopping center management."

located at either end of the mall, ("Got your Broadway down here, got your Sears over here" remarks Ted in Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure) "anchoring" it and drawing in consumers, while the walkway between the stores defines the frontage for other stores. The shopping mall is multi-level, connected with escalators and glass elevators; a large central area, or atrium, is filled with statuary, fountains, booths and displays. High above the atrium, HVAC vents, which continually recirculate the air, can be seen. Somewhere behind the scenes is a master control room that regulates air flow and temperature along with the piped-in muzak.

Sherman Oaks is an example of the most successful mall design in America in the early 70s, the "department store" pattern. In this pattern, the atrium is a large hollowed-out gorge that runs most of the length of the mall and the secondary retailers are strung out alongside the main pedestrian throughfare in the position of separate "departments" within a huge single store. The homogeneity between Sherman Oaks' department store plan and other malls used as locales produces certain generic expectations for the films: the large "anchor" stores at the ends of the mall tend to figure in climactic sequences; the pedestrian routes between these stores become the sites of deadly/farcical chase scenes in several films; atriums and atrium cafes provide teens with their "student union" hangouts (Fast Times, Valley Girl, Weird Science); escalators put young females on display or set up romantic rendezvous between characters; and elevator shafts and labyrinthine HVAC units provide inevitable escape routes in the

sci-fi/horror films. The sci-fi/horror films also introduce us to the mall "control room," where male mall workers scope out females in dressing rooms (Night of the Comet, Chopping Mall, Phantom of the Mall), or where mall owners attempt to control the minds of shoppers using subliminal messages (Phantom of the Mall).

Just whose territory the new atriums and garden courts were became an important issue in the development of the department store plan. Although booths and displays claimed portions of the territory for merchants, the huge atriums left malls without any connection to their earlier urban models: the street, the arcade, and the gallery. For this reason, architects like Maitland and Victor Gruen, the man usually credited for being the "inventor" of the mall, considered the apotheosis of the "department store" mall design as a perversion of the mall's original "integrity" (42). With no clear routes to travel between stores, groups of senior citizens and teens began to claim portions of the "fantasy world" for themselves. The open atriums lined with benches, plants, trees, fountains, and statuary, were easy to confuse with city parks or the town square.

Yet the mall atrium never appears to have succeeded in becoming a true "public domain." The optimistic view of the mall in the city was that it would become an agent of urban renewal; in actuality, as Maitland argues, the malls were usually freestanding edifices that had negative effects on the communities they were placed in, resulting in redefinitions of street frontages and the transformation of neighborhoods into "traffic sewers":

The visible activity of the city has been transferred indoors to a place which, for all its physical proximity to the surrounding streets, is felt to be a separate and isolated precinct, ambiguous in its status as a public place with its own police force and opening hours. Though seeming to offer a generous, all-weather public forum, it is discovered that its activities are carefully screened and restricted to certain acceptable commercial or cultural forms (94-5).

Maitland gives an example of the following "unacceptable" cultural form here: a group of citizens who were prevented from holding a demonstration in the Gallery at Market East, Philadelphia (in 1978) over a local election issue. Because of such censorship of public demonstrations, the only "public activity" that the mall polis appears suited for, Maitland concludes, is shopping. Kowinski concurs on this, quoting from the statements of mall managers whom he interviewed: "Nothing gets in here unless we let it in," and the signs he found displayed on the entrances of malls, e.g., "Areas in Tyson's Corner Center used by the public are not public ways, but are for the use of tenants and the public transacting business with them."

Kowinski also cites the ambiguous judicial history of the private-vs.-public domain issue. In one noteworthy precedent, Lloyd Corp. v. Tanner, 1972, the Supreme Court ruled that antiwar activists could not distribute handbills in the mall without infringing on the private property rights of the owners of the

mall. All these illustrations (Kowinski 354-7) suggest that citizenship in America's new "town squares" belonged exclusively to those who visited them to spend money.

In the teen films, spending is constructed as the solution to teen worries about identity and sexual fulfillment. Mall montages, accompanied by rock and roll, frequently cauterize the film narrative in order to inject consumerist fantasies, and an advertisement for the soundtracks of the film invariably follows its credits, spurring teen audiences on to further consumption.

Once we rid ourselves of the assumption that a teenage subculture is a privileged site of "resistance," that teenage subcultures necessarily predicate themselves off from dominant cultures as "counter-cultures"⁸--quite limiting to a discussion of the 1980s--much of what attracts me here, on the contrary, are the opportunities shopping mall films provide us for

⁸ I would argue that this is an assumption that most high schoolers of the 1980s did not share. For example, in the Fall of 1990, The University of Arizona Composition Department chose Kowinski's chapter on "Growing Up Controlled" for its final exam essay in Freshman English 100, a basic writing class. Here is a response to a question on the issue of whether the shopping mall has any negative effects upon the way teens learn to interact with adults:

...The mall is one of the few places teens have to go to where adults must treat them with respect. As Kowinski said, the mall wants the teenagers there because they will be the future consumers. This requires the adults at the mall to treat teenagers as they would other adults. I feel it is at this level that teenagers are most open to adults, and therefore, the mall is one of the better if not the best place for socialization to occur between teens and adults. Testimony like this, quite typical, is good cause to question the assumption that a "teen culture" must necessarily be a counter-culture. It instead makes the shopping mall sound like an important training ground for membership in adult society.

analyzing in miniature the larger implications of "consumerism" as a shared activity that helps define a culture. Just how and when does consumerism become more than just a kneejerk dollars-and-cents response, and come to resemble a belief system? In sketching out an answer to this question, I will first examine the way the mall's message of consumerism is shown infiltrating the lifestyle of the 1980s teen through the extension and development of the "shopping mall high school" analogy, especially in mall montages. Next, I will consider the films' more intimate psychological "appeals" to the teens in the form of "unlimited shopping" and predatory fantasy sequences, which suggest that the "consumerist discourse" of the dominant culture has successfully begun to exploit teen insecurities and desires. By the end of the decade, mall "consumerism" is showing up in the way teens form relationships with each other. In particular, I will show how the construction of male-female relationships and high school "cliques" in Can't Buy Me Love is founded upon consumerist values.

The Shopping Mall High School:

Fast Times and Valley Girl

"In here the music's always playing. What time is it?-- no time to look back. Stores here are pretty clean. The air is fresh, there's plenty of parking, plenty of space to walk around."

--David Byrne at the mall in

True Stories

"This is the real world, it's not fresh and clean like a television show. You're all fucking programmed!"

--Randy to Julie in Valley Girl

In this section, I will examine the incursion of high school culture into the mall and some of the immediate effects of this phenomenon by examining Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) and Valley Girl (1983). These two films establish a rudimentary discourse of consumerism that is more fully articulated in the films to follow. They exploit ambiguities between the shopping mall and high school environments and position teens in jobs and roles in the mall that directly influence their social and sexual activities elsewhere.

Both Fast Times at Ridgemont High and Valley Girl employ the setting of the shopping mall as a narrative framing device. In Fast Times, the distinction between high school and mall is blurred in the film's first shot, in which we see kids walking into a structure that could easily pass for a suburban high school.⁹ "Many contemporary high schools even look like shopping malls," (8) the writers of The Shopping Mall High School noted, and the film teases us with this visual ambiguity. Similarly, Valley Girl begins with a sweeping aerial view of the Valley, finally coming to rest on a structure that we are too far above to identify. Other

⁹ In the video release, only the word "Ridgemont" can be read on the outside of the building; "Mall" is out of frame.

films to follow these two also used cutting to blur the distinction between high school and mall; in Can't Buy Me Love, for example, Ronald and Cindy meet in a mall clothing shop and then exit together, and in the next shot they are entering a larger lobby area which turns out to be the interior of their high school rather than the mall atrium. The fact that Ronald and Cindy are continuing their earlier conversation adds to the confusion, as do the pillars visible in the background of the shot, recalling pillars that had been seen in an earlier shot of the mall. Finally, as in Fast Times, the mall and the school in Can't Buy Me Love share the same name (Tucson High/Tucson Mall), cementing the relationship of identity.

The concluding sequences of Fast Times and Valley Girl complete the framework by returning to the mall. The theme taken up by Fast Times is "closing time": we see the doors of the stereo store being locked and the roll-up door of the pizza parlor being pulled down, followed by the title "The End" displayed on a video machine. In Valley Girl, the darkened name of the Sherman Oaks Galleria can just barely be read in the background as Julie throws the bracelet that she had been given by her "Valley dude," Tommy, out the window of her true love's car. The gesture signals her return to the "real world" from suburbia, so the lights out at the "fantasy world" of the mall seems particularly appropriate.

It would be inaccurate to take Janet Maslin's comment that "most of the kids spend their time" at the mall as a precis of the plot of either of these two movies, because in both cases we are

limited primarily to the framing sequences at the beginning and endings of the movies. In between, there are the scenes at the characters' homes, their high school, and the "party out of control" sequences characteristic of other teen films of the 1980s. We rarely actually return to the mall setting as such, even though it certainly could be argued that all of the "romances" that take place later in Fast Times are set up in the opening mall scenes (as is Julie's break up with Tommy in Valley Girl), suggesting a "commodification" of sex, and the Ridgemont High students do seem to pursue "consumerist" goals (see below). There is clearly an effort on the part of directors Amy Heckerling and Martha Coolidge, however, to compress as comprehensive a picture of teenagers' use of mall space as possible into the interior "mall montages" that follow the opening shots of both films. These sequences suggest that the mall is the proper environment in which to study kids of the '80s.

The montage in Fast Times consists of a series of signs that associate young people with the mall: there are shots of kids teasing an older woman on an escalator, a pizza shop, tickets being taken at the movie theatre, a record store, of pizza being put in an oven, another fast food restaurant, two young women fighting over a pair of pants on a rack, cheese being put on a pizza, cookies sliding off a tray, corn dogs being dipped, and finally, a sequence in a video arcade. The iconography is fairly direct: teen groups are being associated here with rowdiness, the tendency that must be controlled in public; nevertheless, they are also depicted

as valuable consumers who spend a lot of time and money at pizza shops, record shops, and theaters. It is also clear that teens compose a large set of mall workers, and their jobs are depicted as being mindlessly repetitive. Finally, the video arcade is the one environment shown that appears to be the "exclusive" province of teens. The song "We Got the Beat" by the Go-Gos seems like an appropriate accompaniment to the entire sequence, because the montage appears to be claiming portions of the public territory (a "beat") in the mall for teens.

In the rest of the sequence, we see some of the principals in action: Brad (Judge Reinhold), a fast-food worker extraordinaire who says "hi" to several people as he walks to his job; a young female being approached by a male; and Mike Domano (Robert Romanus), a ticket scalper who is cruising the mall for business. As he walks, Mike adjusts his collar, then rides down the glass elevator to the atrium area with the stereotypical mannerisms of a businessman heading to work. This second half of the montage has begun to further divide the mall territory by establishing separate zones for males and females and by suggesting different roles: males are associated with physical activity and roam the atrium freely, in business for themselves; females are shown in relatively static groups, or become mesmerized by the sales in clothing stores. They tend to be frozen in flat shots of body parts, or are allowed to drift across frame slowly on the escalator.

Brad's excessive love for his fast-food job at the Bronco Burger is marked as his eccentricity in the film ("I'm a single

successful guy" is a gag line he repeats twice), and yet a similar claim could be made for Mike and his friend, Mark "Rat" Rafner (the name carries associations with "mall rat," a term for teens), who holds a "good job" at the theater. All of these males are proud of what they do. However, they tend to spend so much of their free time at high school discussing their jobs, making contacts, and "networking" that they seem somewhat "hurried" into careers.

The female characters in the film, on the other hand, seem to care less about their jobs for themselves and more for the social opportunities and chances for "popularity" that being at the mall opens up to them: for example, Brad's sister Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh), who works at a pizza restaurant, makes a date with an older customer who is an "audio consultant" at the stereo store. In between her other duties she discusses the audio consultant excitedly with her friend Linda (Phoebe Cates); the latter "hurries her into" sex by remarking, "Stacy, what are you waiting for? You're fifteen years old. I did it when I was thirteen." Working in the pizza restaurant only seems to succeed in putting Stacy on display for (as well as in service to) the males in the mall. "How about a meatball sandwich, a medium coke, and your phone number?" the stereo consultant asks her, as though that is the acceptable cultural form.

The "good job at the mall" appears to be what permits the stereo consultant, then Mike, and finally Rat, to win Stacy over. "Look at her . . . look at you," Mark tells Rat in order to inspire

him to ask Stacy out. "Member of the honor roll. Assistant to the Assistant Manager of the Movie Theater. I'm tellin ya, Rat, if this girl can't smell your qualifications, then who needs her, right?" Similarly, Stacy's brother Brad's burger-and-fry cooking prowess makes him feel important enough to think his co-worker, a cashier at the Bronco Burger, will never leave him. Working in the shopping mall thus "programs" the male characters to think of themselves as being in a position of power over females.

* * *

In Valley Girl, the opening montage presents us with another basic iconography, this time of female shopping: we see Julie (Deborah Foreman) and her friends trying on blouses and belts, a shot of charge slips being run through, shoes, a cash register, a blouse and the cards together, other clothing accessories, etc. The sequence suggests some further associations that become metonymical ways of "reading" female characters in the films to follow: an obsession with clothing, the idea of "accessorizing" to construct a complete image; and the almost instinctive use of someone else's money, a parent's "plastic." In Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure, for example, it takes "The Babes"--two girls whom Rufus has brought into the future from the Dark Ages in his time machine--only a few hours to navigate "the mall," learn to use credit cards, get make-overs, and become fully "accessorized." The Valley Girl montage is accompanied by the song "They Got a Name for Girls Like Me," appropriate for such a narcissistic spree.

As in Fast Times, romance is a natural topic of conversation in the mall. Julie openly discusses the problems she is having with Tommy (Michael Bowen) as she eats in the garden court with her friends, and then serendipitously she and Tommy meet and ride down an escalator together, arguing about Tommy's failure to phone her. By the time they are ready to get off the escalator, they have decided to break up. Tommy thinks that Julie must be "totally freaking out," because "none of the other Valley dudes can touch me." His neatly groomed hair and polo shirts with upturned collars seem to present Julie with the strongest argument for keeping him, because she remarks that his "brains are bad news." Conversely, "Normal parties," "normal places," and "nice, new clothes" are the aspects of her life Julie misses the most when she starts going out with Randy (Nicholas Cage's character). Randy's longer and perpetually mussed spiked hair, torn vest and gold chains are regarded with horror when he walks into a Valley party. Significantly, Julie first spots Cage on the beach, the one neutral ground place where she and her friends are unable to judge that he is "not one of us" by the clothes he has on. Valley Girl thus suggests that Julie and her female friends are so preoccupied with clothes that they are blind to all human qualities. Even after Julie's hippie-cum-health food store owner father gives her a lecture about how she shouldn't judge people according to the way they speak or dress, and that she shouldn't let these be her criteria in choosing between Tommy and Randy, Julie responds, "I know, but which do I pick?" Julie and her friends are represented

as being completely "neutral," unable to make decisions for themselves.

This preoccupation with clothes and demonstrated inability of students to "choose" for themselves are two of the tendencies that appalled the educators who wrote The Shopping Mall High School. The inability to make decisions appears to have affected males as well as females in Fast Times, if one considers Spicoli (Sean Penn), who is a kind of monument to passivity, unable to make up his mind whether to come to school at all (like students in the shopping mall high school, he has to be "enticed" to learn with promises of a birthday celebration for him in class and the like). He is unwilling to get a job, or to do much of anything except dream of surfing. But although Spicoli mixes a little recreational spending in with his high school studies (ordering a pizza delivered to his history class, for example) he does not appear, like Julie, to be wholly driven by the need to spend. This raises a question concerning the differing impacts of consumerism upon males and females.

Shopping Fantasies

"Shopping is a feeling . . . sometimes I get a wobbly feeling . . . I have a commercial feeling . . . be sexy in business . . . be successful at night . . . think of where you'll be each day and coordinate your outfit to match."

--Kay Culver's fashion show incantation in

True Stories

"I want her to live, I want her to breathe, I want her to aerobicize."

--Gary to Wyatt in Weird Science

Although I have been using the term "teenager" rather indiscriminantly this paper so far, it becomes important to work with a gendered account of the teenage subculture as I consider the issue of the "shopping fantasy" sequences in later mall films. To establish some of the parameters for my discussion, I find Angela McRobbie's 1980 article entitled "Settling Accounts with Subcultures" useful here.

McRobbie explores the teenage subculture of rock and roll and finds that it reproduces discourses of male sexuality and "violent" rebellion that tend to exclude and exploit its female members. Questions that McRobbie finds useful for separating out the different roles assigned to males and females within the rock and roll subculture include: "What is the nature of women's and girl's leisure? What role do hedonism, fantasy escapes, and imaginary solutions play in their lives?" (69). It is important to interrogate the mall films similarly, I think, because the "fantasy escapes" constructed in these films suggest quite different positionings for males and females: "shopping fantasies," in the first case, are almost exclusively associated with females and tend to follow a route that travels from "hedonistic" spending and

living out one's consumerist dreams to the achievement of "popularity." In the second kind of fantasy, consumerism is conflated with cannibalism and the corresponding sequences often terminate in a coda of rape or death. This second form of fantasy escape, and its underlying subtext of "violence," is strongly associated with the male sector of the teenage mall subculture. McRobbie argues that the source of such a "violent" male discourse is actually outside the teen subculture; that it mirrors the dominant culture because it reproduces the notion that males "ought to" objectify the female. Slightly expanding upon McRobbie's point here, I would argue that the filmic construction of both the female "shopping fantasy" and the male fantasy of violent sexual control in the films draw upon dominant discourses of consumerism for their images and symbols. Perhaps the tendency to "consume" the female as a commodity that forms part of the male teenage fantasy is what triggers a more "violent" discourse of social Darwinism, and even cannibalism, in the films.

Night of the Comet is the apocalyptic tale of a pair of Valley Girl sisters who accidentally survive the destructive influence of a comet that turns most of the Earth's population into dust, and causes the rest to slowly deteriorate into zombies. Reggie (Catherine Mary Stewart) is the strong sister, unbeatable at video wargames and trained in self-defense, and Sam (Kelli Maroney, who had played a squeamish high school student in Fast Times) is the weaker younger sister who fits the conventional "Valley Girl" stereotype. Other survivors of the comet include Hector (Robert

Beltran), a Hispanic truckdriver whom the sisters compete over, and a group of scientists who have survived in kind of a biosphere environment.

Reggie manages to keep herself and her sister alive by blasting the occasional zombie with her submachine gun, but Sam pines until Reggie takes her shopping in a deserted mall. The two joke about not needing their Mastercards and Sam "instinctively" begins to gossip about the people at her school (now of course dead) as they begin to try on outfits. The song "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" comes up on the soundtrack. Again, the female "obsession" with wardrobe is being depicted here, as is the mall's "lulling effect" on shoppers, for Sam and Reggie seem to lose track of time and become vulnerable to an attack.

The shopping fantasy sequence comes to a grim end when Reggie and Sam discover that they are being monitored from a control booth by stock boys who have been turned into stalking zombies by the comet. As the sisters giggle and hold a high school conversation about whether the new boy in their life will turn out to be a "fag," the lights suddenly go down and the zombie leader begins to taunt them over the P.A. system. In the resulting shootout, Sam is captured, and Reggie is forced to surrender. The two literally become "prisoners of the mall," a motif that is repeated in subsequent horror films. The zombie mall workers are on the verge of devouring them when the sisters are rescued by a party of the scientists, who had, fortunately, been able to apply "deductive reasoning" to the question of "Where would adolescents with nothing

to do go?"

It is important to note here that all of the zombies depicted in this film are male. The only possible exception is Audrey (Mary Woronov), one of the scientists from the lab who is slowly "deteriorating," but who commits suicide before reaching the feasting-on-flesh stage. Like its direct predecessor, George Romero's Dawn of the Dead, this film seems hesitant to portray females as predators, and shots of females feasting on males or upon other females are prohibited by something approaching a sexual taboo. Romero's film contains dozens of graphic shots of zombies getting their heads blown off, but almost none of the cannibalistic "consumers" in his universe are female. Even though Dawn of the Dead contains many overt analogies between the zombies and modern consumers ("They're us") on its surface, its violent central metaphor of cannibalism/ consumption and its survival-of-the-fittest plot is hence distinctly constructed as a male discourse.

It could perhaps be claimed for Night of the Comet that it attempts to exalt the female within the "fittest to survive" discourse, or that Reggie constitutes something of a predator herself. Her prowess in zapping the enemy does make Reggie a forerunner of the Sigourney Weaver character in Aliens. But this talent is clearly constructed in the film as her achievement in a "male game;" Reggie scorns her weak stepmother and clearly takes after her father, who, according to the stepmother, is off in "Bananaland" killing Sandanistas. Similarly, when Kelli Maroney squeezes off a good shot in Chopping Mall, destroying one of the

Killbots, she responds "Dad's a marine" by way of explanation to an astounded Ferdie. On the other hand, the joking references made by the males in this latter film to film texts such as Dirty Harry and Rambo ("Let's go send those fuckers a Rambo-gram!"), and the gleefulness they exhibit as they break into "Peckinpah's Sporting Goods" and begin to play soldier with the guns they find there make it clear to us that war games are embodied within the male fantasy, a particularly violent resort for re-establishing control over others.

The male scientists in Night of the Comet, who are counting upon blood transfusions from Reggie and Sam to stay alive, present us with one of the purest metaphors of the predatory nature of the male consumerist fantasy; in the film, males in power stalk two females who exist only as physical "commodities" to be literally "consumed." But not all "predators" need be zombies under this definition. The archetype of the male predator in the shopping mall high school film would probably be Mike Damano in Fast Times, who expounds a "five-point plan" for capturing females to his friend Rat;¹⁰ Additionally, Mike succeeds in using Stacy's body for sex, in a scene in which the latter is so "hurried" against her will that the act becomes rape. In a later scene, when Stacy interrupts Mike in the middle of some ticket scalping at the high

¹⁰ This "plan" consists of a set of strategies for gaining control over the female, ranging from the direct to the subliminal: (1) "Never let on how much you like her," (2) "Always call the shots," (3) "Act like wherever you are, that's the place to be," (4) "When ordering food, find out what she wants, then order for the both of you," (5) "When it comes down to makin' out, whenever possible, put on Side One of Led Zeppelin IV."

school with the news that she is pregnant, he tries to bargain with her over her "body"; i.e., over the price of an abortion. They agree to a figure of \$75.00 (half the cost of the operation) plus a ride to the abortion clinic, but then Mike stands Stacy up, apparently in fulfillment of the "male attitude" that according to him "dictates that you don't care whether she comes, stays, lays, or prays." This "attitude" of Mike's reflects his assumption that females exist to be consumed and discarded by males, and the way he uses Stacy shows how thoroughly the analogy of cannibalism/consumption has penetrated into male-female relationships.

The list of male "predators" who stalk female flesh in mall films would also include Tommy and Randy in Valley Girl, Gary and Wyatt in Weird Science (who scope out a female gym class), the male workers at the Furniture King in Chopping Mall, the male workers (and of course Eric) in Phantom of the Mall, or even Bill and Ted, who stalk the past for not just "historical figures," but "babes." In fact, in all of the films I will consider, males rely on females to fulfill their masturbation fantasies and to provide them with the "popularity" from which they have been cut off.

* * *

Chopping Mall features roving bands of mall security system robots that go haywire during an electrical storm and become "Killbots," mercilessly preying on trapped teens. Unfortunately it is Kelli Maroney (the weaker sister in Night of the Comet) who

makes a return to the mall as Allison, and the attempt to package her as a stronger character is ineffective. She, like the other female characters in the film, makes most of the dumb mistakes, screams loudly for help, and has to be rescued by the males. In Allison's case, she has to be saved by Ferdie, the high school nerd, and the two predictably form a couple at the end.

Chopping Mall is perhaps the first film to take place entirely within the mall setting, and presents us with a few new modifications of the mall space as the extension of high school activities and as a "fantasy world." In the opening montage, for example, we see a teenager smuggling albums out of a record store, two teenagers passionately kissing on a bench (as senior citizens watch from the next bench), and older men shoving kids out of their positions in front of video machines in the arcade. Another kid skateboards through the atrium area, weaving in and out among a train of beauty queens in bathing suits who wear sashes promoting the mall: "HAVE A BALL," "TAKE THE KIDS," "THE FUTURE IS NOW," and "PARK PLAZA MALL." They ride down the escalator, which permits their bodies to be put on display for the film audience, and for a teen worker carrying a box up the adjoining escalator; predictably, he spills the box.

One of the things that is noteworthy about this montage, and the film itself, is how rapidly teens are represented as having pervaded and domesticated the space of the mall by 1986. Teens and younger kids are the most populous group represented in the montage, followed closely by senior citizens. Teens also appear to

be the only group to have succeeded in channeling the atrium into a kind of street. Furthermore, the shops along the sides of the atrium appear to have assumed the status of houses in the minds of the teens. Two of the characters work in shops run by their fathers, and the other characters "call for them" at the shops after work. The party at the Furniture King (owned by Ferdie's father) houses the "house" party of other teen films: Ferdie and Allison turn one area of the showroom into their living room, watching t.v. on a couch, while the other teens make for the bedroom furniture.

The montage sequence with the beauty queens also extends our notion of the mall (atrium) as a potential male fantasy world that commodifies females and puts them on display. We can compare the escalator sequence in this film to one in Weird Science in which Kelly LeBrock stuns the male teenagers as she ascends. In Chopping Mall, sexism runs through the whole film in the male workers' references to the females--they present opportunities for "snagging skin"--or in the token shot of a young woman's breasts during the party that the teens hold at a Furniture King store.¹¹ In addition, an employee locker room complete with shower has been surgically implanted into the mall in another sequence, apparently with the sole purpose of creating the opportunity for a little extra fetishistic scopophilia. This blindness to sexism is not only typical of Hollywood, but a distinct characteristic of the

¹¹ The Variety review of Chopping Mall described this shot as characteristic of director Jim Wynorski's particular "fetish."

students observed as part of the Shopping Mall High School study. "We found numerous examples of male teachers using sexual innuendo with female students," reads the educators' report. "In one physical education class it was common knowledge that the way to get a good grade was not to wear a bra. Despite mandated equality, the treatment of females is surprisingly and routinely chauvinistic" (339). To put it in Maitland's words, sexism was something students commonly perceived to be an "acceptable cultural form."

Female Popularity and Male Control

"Popularity isn't perfect. It almost feels like a job sometimes."

--Cindy to Ronnie in Can't Buy Me Love

"I want to rent you."

--Ronnie to Cindy

In Weird Science (1985) the mall functions most basically as the extension of the high school, where groups of teens seem to congregate in great numbers in the central atrium and act according to the rules of their high school cliques. But additionally, the mall setting creates the opportunity for two computer nerds, Gary (Anthony Michael Hall) and his friend Wyatt (Ilan Michell-Smith) to achieve "popularity" through the strategic deployment of the woman whom they have created on their home computer (played by Kelly

LeBrock). It is to the important development of this paradigm of male/female popularity that I now turn.

The "mall" sequence in Weird Science is brief, but manages to establish an economy for the entire film. First we see Wyatt and Gary trying to gain a measure of prestige in the eyes of a perfume counter clerk (who happens to be a girl from their school) by buying perfume for their new "girlfriend." The two go a little overboard, however, by asking for three bottles. We then see Kelly LeBrock purchasing some "hot" lingerie to wear for the boys before cutting back to Wyatt and Gary fantasizing about their new creation in the mall atrium. The two have just stopped feeling like nerds when a group from the high school dumps an icee over their heads from above. This causes them to temporarily "go into a social coma" until LeBrock comes to their rescue. She first dazzles Wyatt and Gary's enemies on the escalator by displaying her physical "assets," and then, by making a fuss over Wyatt and Gary, succeeds in launching a popularity campaign for them. We could say that the formula for male popularity appears to be about the same in this film as it had been in the Tom Cruise film Risky Business (1983): the sexually exotic, "possessed" older woman plus the "hot" car = popularity. In Risky Business, the "possessed" woman is a prostitute; in Weird Science, a robot; in Can't Buy Me Love, a rented cheerleader. The woman typically becomes a active agent in the male search for popularity by inspiring him to use a father's car (Risky Business), by actually creating the car (Weird Science), or just by fixing it up (as in Better Off Dead, 1985, in which a

French foreign exchange student named Monique gets Lane's--John Cusack's--Camaro running again).

Males in these films do not have a direct line to "popularity," but can only achieve it through the demonstrated ownership/control of a sexually exotic female (typically a cheerleader). "Popularity," then, is ultimately a kind of prestige granted by the high school crowd in proportion to the amount of one's assets-- physical "assets" and designer accessories for females, financial capital, a car, and a submissive female for males. Inviting everyone present in the mall scene to a party at Wyatt's house before zooming the boys away in a "hot" car, LeBrock ensures that their popularity "campaign" will be carried further by quickly touching base with the most important cultural subcultural rubrics. Wyatt and Gary merely reinforce the impression that they have made later on at the party by successfully parading LeBrock a second time; they subsequently undergo an elevation in status and win girlfriends for themselves.

* * *

Can't Buy Me Love (1988) illustrates the complete saturation of consumerism into the high school world of Reagan Era teens. It carries the motif of the male fantasy to possess and consume and the male commodification of the female body to its logical extreme. In Can't Buy Me Love, a male "purchases" a female's services at a shopping mall. Cindy Mancini (Amanda Peterson) is the high school cheerleader, who, although not a "Valley Girl" proper, shares

Julie's obsession with clothes and surrounds herself with a group of friends with interests identical to hers. When we first meet Cindy, she and her friends have just returned from the mall, loaded down with shopping bags, and she is reprimanded by her mother for having used too many credit cards. Cindy shrugs her off, apparently regarding the shopping spree as a necessary getting-ready-for-the-business-of-school expense. She marshals her cheerleader-clique friends to her room in a manner that would be cleverly satirized the next year in the comedy Heathers (1988), in which each of the friends named "Heather" is ranked by number according to her position of "popularity" in the clique. Cindy's duty as head of the "cool clique," like Heather Number One's, puts her in the position of an executive. Her friends answer her private phone line as though they are at an office: "Hello, Cindy Mancini." These friends also appear to be virtually interchangeable, because their only function is to accompany Cindy everywhere so that she will never be seen alone; when their leader leaves the room, they just sit watching t.v. blankly and do not talk to each other.

Mrs. Mancini gives Cindy a lecture on "responsi-bility," wondering why she can't be more like "the Miller boy," Ronald, or Ronnie (played by Patrick Dempsey).¹² After her lecture, there

¹² Here we have another example of a fairly direct "mirroring" of the dominant culture in a teen film. Ronald not only shares his nickname and central pursuit (of popularity) with Ronald Reagan, but his is a "gipper" tale that involves rising against the odds. Later, he is dependent upon Cindy to preserve his image at the school in a way Reagan was thought to be dependent upon his wife Nancy.

is a cut to a shot of Ronald out mowing a lawn on a riding mower. He has just completed the quite incredible task of mowing his 286th square mile of grassy yards in Tucson, Arizona; this has earned him \$1500 over the summer vacation, a sum he plans to spend on a telescope. But what Ronald, a "nerd" would really prefer is to become "popular," so he asks his friend Kenneth (Courtney Gains) what he thinks it would take for him to achieve this. The two are riding near the high school on their bicycles, and Kenneth gestures towards a muscle car and an attractive girl, saying "Now there's the answer, buddy. If you want to be popular, you need one of those . . . and one of those." When Ronald despairs that his \$1500 wouldn't buy him more than the wheels of the car, Kenneth drops a remark that telegraphs the shopping mall scene to follow: "You can rent 'em, you know."

In the mall scene, Ronald offers to "rent" Cindy's services. He is on the verge of purchasing his telescope when he spies Cindy through the scope. The scope shot here recalls the male fantasy of using high-tech equipment to "monitor" the female in the mall, and the positioning of the scope and the male salesclerk's exchange with Ronnie contains overt phallic references. Cindy is walking into a clothing store, where she will try to return a new suede dress of her mother's that she stained at a party. She had overruled another one of her mother's warnings by borrowing it in the first place, but again the immediate social "requirement" of making an appearance at a party had seemed like a good enough reason at the time to her. Once again it seems true to character

(or rather to the "Valley Girl" stereotype) that Cindy's life crisis occurs over an article of clothing, or that she would display no moral scruples about what she is willing to sacrifice to repair the damage: "I will do anything," she pleads in tears to the salesclerk. Although the salesclerk is not buying, Ronald is, sputtering out "I want to rent you" and handing his \$1500 over to the clerk. Cindy agrees to submit to Ronald's fantasy of control by helping him to become "popular" for a month in exchange for the money.

She tries to accomplish this task, first, by employing some of her "feminine" talents. The next day at school, she mouses Ronald's hair, rips the sleeves off of his shirt, takes off his glasses, and pulls his collar up. She later takes Ronald shopping in the mall, where she teaches him to "accessorize," pulling him from one shop to the next. Apparently Cindy has no scruples about providing Ronald with such "essentials" as sunglasses using several of her mother's credit cards. Again, (as in Valley Girl, Night of the Comet, or Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure) the teenage female in the mall movies appears to consider designer items "necessities" and "essentials" and to think of credit cards as passports to popularity rather than "real" money. All of these additions to Ronald's wardrobe and appearance may have the effect of getting more attention from the females in the school. To win the respect of the males, however, Ronald has to encourage them to think that he and Cindy are going out--that she is "his." Cindy warns Ronald that there is to be "no hand-holding, no kissing," but

grudgingly agrees to sit next to him at lunch, which wins Ronald the admiration of the cool clique. When Ronald begins to show up at the local hangout and to parties with Cindy, he encourages the members of the football team to think that he and Cindy are "more than just friends."

What seals Ronald's "popularity" for good is not so much the fact that he is "dating" Cindy (that astonishes), but rather the way in which he abuses Cindy in front of the school during their staged "break up" at the end of the month. The violence of the conversation convinces everyone in the school that Ronald is absolutely "in control." Cindy has sincerely begun to like Ronald by this point in the film, so there is no logical reason for the breakup at all, and indeed, a subtext of sadism emerges as Ronald completely controls the terms of the breakup, cutting off Cindy by shouting, "I'm tired of you, period" while she cries a few "real" tears. "It's awful the way Ronnie annihilated her" is one student's appreciative comment upon the breakup. To the females in the school, Ronald's new appearance and new found association with Cindy makes him a "heartbreaker"; to the males, the way he consumes and crushes Cindy finally makes him one of the guys, "the Ronster."

Can't Buy Me Love thus neatly draws the female and male consumerist fantasies together through the paradigm of "popularity." This is first and foremost constructed as a "job" for females. As Ronald observes to Cindy one day as he washes her car for her, "Cheerleading's hard work. You do it well." Cindy is beginning to think that perhaps Ronald isn't such a "spaz" after

all by this time, and has some doubts about the superiority of her own clique, answering: "I guess . . . but what I mean is I don't do much else except shop and hang out." The warning that Cindy attempts to give Ronald when they are about to "break up" is that "Popularity isn't perfect--It's almost like a job sometimes," and that "Whatever happens with the popularity thing, stay yourself." In fact, it turns out that Ronald loses his celebrity status in the high school when Bobby, Cindy's ex-boyfriend who is now a star football player in college, returns to a high school party and calls Cindy a "prostitute" for going out with Ronnie. This public devaluation of Cindy's position seems to threaten her popularity, and in defense of herself, she chooses to announce the fact that she had charged Ronald \$1500 for her escort services. Ironically, it is by admitting that she has been accepting Ronnie's money that she defuses the prostitute remark. It is not troubling to the crowd that Cindy has allowed herself to be "rented"; on the contrary, the revelation of the high price she can command for her services instantly restores her respect in the school.

It also shows everyone in the "cool clique" that Ronald has been separated from the "nerd herd" where he really belongs. His money spent, his girlfriend exposed as a hoax, Ronald is reduced so low that he is shunned even by his school's two lowest cliques, the nerds and the "mutants." Relegation to this "clique" is strongly streaked through with class connotations, since the popularity game appears to be played according to the rules of a simple market economy. It comes as no surprise that so many of the teen films of

the decade, like Can't Buy Me Love, also conflate high school cliques with social class in their attacks of cliquishness.¹³ Unlike Cindy, who appears able to tap into a virtually unlimited line of credit through her mother's cards, and who has plenty of leisure time to "shop and hang out," Ronald is frequently shown working hard. His father is an aluminum siding salesman. The "nerds" drive their parent's cars or ride bicycles, and the "cools" have their own cars. Ronald's dream of "popularity" is therefore, in a sense, a working class consumerist fantasy, and the sudden turnabout in his "fortune" causes him to slight his old friends socially.

One day at lunch he decides that he has had enough, and makes a speech against cliques that wins kudos from not only the cool clique, but from the entire school, teachers and superintendents inclusive: "Cools, nerds, your side, my side, man, it's all bullshit. It's tough enough just to be yourself." The film thus closes with an attack against cliques and the "popularity" system, and indeed, the message implied by its title did seem to warm many high schoolers' hearts (if the reactions of my own students who attended Tucson High may be permitted as evidence); yet, very characteristically, it never really questions the differential positionings of males and females within that system. The "Valley" stereotype which dictates that females are shallowly consumed by commercial desires for clothes and accessories is merely absorbed

¹³ Cp. The Breakfast Club (1985), Some Kind of Wonderful (1987), or Pretty in Pink (1989), for example.

into the film without comment, and we are given no inkling of what an alternative "acceptable form" of behavior for a young woman might be; the film never questions the necessity of using another's money or of "accessorizing" in order to survive. The New York Times reviewer of the film, Caryn James, asked: "If Cindy now knows how empty popularity is, why doesn't she dump her hypocritical girlfriends, who put the moves on Ronnie?"¹⁴ Toward the end of the film, Cindy appears to understand the super-ficiality of her relationships with her friends, but can't make the decision to abandon them--apparently they are still too "valuable" social connections for her to discarded.

Nor is the movie's larger attack against the paradigm of popularity (by now, clearly the subcultural synonym for dominant culture "consumerism") very well articulated. James asks further: "If Ronald learns his neat little lesson about love, why is he rewarded with a happy ending that reunites him with Cindy and the cheerleading crowd?" Although Ronald acknowledges in his speech to the school that "I tried to buy my way in," he is last shown riding off into the sunset with Cindy on the back of his riding mower. This is the kind of "punishment," of course, that Ronald has been seeking all along. Although he appears to have achieved his goal by throwing in a little personal charm along with his capital assets, in a way, money has helped him, too. Cindy's surrender to him while he is on the job seems to reaffirm, all over again,

¹⁴ The title of James' review of the film, which appeared on 8/14/87, was "Popularity."

Ronald's value as a provider.

Perhaps this is the definitive message of the 1980s teen movie after all: that money can't buy you love, but it certainly helps, and it's best to have your cake and eat it too.¹⁵ What can be said for Ronald is that he has succeeded in "beating" the popularity system in the school by faking it to get in (if you can beat the system to get ahead, do it). But Can't Buy Me Love clearly fails to interrogate the consumerist prerequisite itself by asking the question that it could have: "Why should Ronnie even bother?"

Exposing the Control System

"Waterstreet [Pavillion] brings a fun atmosphere that comes with the festival marketplace, much like other festival marketplaces around the country."

--the Convention and Tourism Bureau
President of Flint, Michigan,
interviewed in Roger and Me

¹⁵ Since we have also taken the teen films as our text for the adult consumerism of the decade, it is important to add that this message shows up in the "adult" movies as well. Indeed, consumerism permeated into other cultural sites in addition to the mall: into domestic space War of the Roses, civic areas (the tough, money-run Gotham and NYC of the comics in Batman, Dick Tracy, Dark Man), and of course, into white collar business and the Exchange (Working Girl, Wall Street). If there is a single axiological line over which most "adult" movies of the decade center, it is the machiavellian conflict between ethical choice and greed. As in the teen films, the outcome in the adult films is often a compromise.

And you dreamed it all / and this is your story / Do you
know who you are? / you're the dream operator

--lyrics to the song "Dream Operator" (True
Stories)

In one scene in The Phantom of the Mall, a mall worker (Buzz) coaxes a newspaper photographer into the mall surveillance room with the lure of a big story. Once there, Buzz delays for a moment, playing around with the controls that adjust the picture on the monitors. "Listen to what it does to your body," he kids as he switches on the muzak and sways back and forth to the melody. Just as the reporter grows impatient with him, Buzz flips a second switch that filters a subliminal message to shoppers out of the muzak track: "the sales clerks are my friends . . . I can buy anything I want on credit . . . shopping is fun . . . I like to shop . . . the sales clerks are my friends . . . I like to spend money . . . shopping makes me feel good . . . spending money makes me feel good." Buzz's dramatic expose comes to a rather undramatic end, however, when Pete (the photographer) informs him that there is nothing illegal about the messages.

Mall "control rooms" had been depicted in earlier movies like Night of the Comet and Chopping Mall, but these scenes are not presented with the same tenor of "revelation" or of an expose as in this later film. Phantom of the Mall attempts to construct a discourse that exposes the hypocrisy of the mall in the small town. The title cut, for example, casts the story of mall expansion into

economic terms. The song (reminiscent of the rock and roll classic "Twelfth Flight Rock") divides this development into four "phases." "Phase One" of mall expansion means making room for the developers at the expense of the town residents--"Sorry, son / you're in the way / now you're out, well-done." According to this movie's scenario, the mall's corrupt owner has hired an arsonist to burn down Eric's (the "Phantom's") house, resulting in the death of his parents and Eric's own disfigurement. "Phase Two" refers us to the entrance of the Mayor (played by Morgan Fairchild in the movie), who covers the owner's trail with a patriotic speech at the Fourth-of-July mall opening ceremonies; in actuality, Fairchild has ties to the evil developer and hopes to profit from his crime. The lyrics "Phase Three / four stories high / a place to shop and a place to die" and "Phase Four / the final stage / victims hired at the minimum wage" obviously refer us to the mall itself as a place which lures shoppers and robs teen mall workers of their humanity. Interestingly, the song seems aware of the profit motive underlying the mall and disowns this ("Don't need no frozen yoghurt"); however, it is characteristically blind to sexual exploitation, containing references to the Mayor's breasts and to the "foxy outfits at Hotdog On a Stick."¹⁶

The story also follows the paradigm of female fantasy and male control fairly closely, as in the earlier mall films, and indeed,

¹⁶ The sexism is also marked in the way the song subdivides the floor space of the mall into zones for fetishizing the female consumer: "First Floor, the power of zoom / checking out cleavage in the dressing room," etc.

even extends the predatory male fantasy to new limits. As in Night of the Comet and Chopping Mall, the control room functions as a place to extend male masturbation fantasies electronically. In Night of the Comet, the zombies drool over the females as they watch them shop; in Chopping Mall, one of the mall controllers flips through a Playboy as he watches his screen; in Phantom, one of the controllers begs out loud for the women in the dressing rooms he monitors to take it off. Predictably, although the way the control room places the mall operators in a position of superiority over both male and female shoppers is constructed as a bad thing in Phantom, the film does not examine its own predilection for male teenage voyeurism. The technological breakthroughs of mall control systems have become a useful way for the film to extend its own adolescent tendencies, permitting its teenage audience to indulge its fantasies of control over females. Eric ("the Phantom") uses his ability to enter and exit the mall control rooms and HVAC units to extend his scopic power. He sets up his own mall control room with pilfered equipment and begins to monitor his ex-girlfriend Melody's every move on television. He steals a wardrobe of clothes from department stores for her, and (as if relying on the power of the stereotype), expects this to be enough to win her back. When he eventually captures Melody, he tells her that she can never leave him because she belongs to him. Thus, even though it can be claimed for this film, as I have, that it attains a kind of second level of commentary, Phantom remains hypocritical by questioning one form of predatory fantasy but not

another.

On the other hand, his choice of victim, more creative and brutal forms of slaughtering, and a first name may have succeeded in making Eric popular with some of the members of his teenage audience. More importantly, the rhetoric of the city planners and their "selfish dreams" are finally subjected to the horror film's revenge. "I . . . have . . . money" the mall manager sputters to Eric a second before Eric torches him with a flame thrower; Morgan Fairchild gets thrown out of a store window and is impaled in the atrium in the next scene. In Chopping Mall, by contrast, the worst offenses that the teenage victims appear to be guilty of are premarital sex and stupidity. After finishing their victims off, the Killbots spout "Have a Nice Day," which only seems to rub the consumerist discourse in their faces (after all, like the zombies in Night of the Comet, the Killbots are only a new species of mall workers gone haywire who think that they are still doing their job). In short, the only rule for the deaths in the earlier films had been is survival of the fittest, whereas Eric's victims in Phantom of the Mall do not seem innocent of corruption.

Two "adult" movies of the second half of the decade also offer mall exposes of a kind. One of these is David Byrne's True Stories, which brings another "subliminal message" of consumerism to the surface during a fashion show sequence that takes place at a mall. Byrne, the onscreen narrator, begins this section of the film (titled "Shopping is a Feeling") with the comment that the people who live in Virgil, Texas are "wise to advertiser's claims."

And yet, as the announcer's sales pitch at the fashion show tapers off into non sequiturs, eventually becoming a dreamy song that lulls the crowd into a state of appreciation, Byrne's comment clearly becomes more and more ironic. The lyrics in the announcer's song suggest her manipulation of the crowd overtly: "My face is a book / but it's not what it seems" or "Let go of your life / Grab on to my hand," for example.

What is remarkable about this fashion show sequence is the way the announcer's discourse seems to become double-voiced, masking and unmasking the producer's intentions at the same time. Although the announcer, Kay Culver (played by Annie McEnroe) does indicate that the show has been produced ("From the dream factory . . . a bonanza of beauty"), the refrain of the song is duplicitous, insisting to the members of the audience that they are the dream operators. The duplicity illustrates the way the mall advertisers hope the consumer will "buy" the image of themselves that they are being sold and make it their own. This duplicity also extends to other levels. During one verse, Kay might be addressing the female consumer with her song,

When you were little / you dreamed you were big
Musta been something / a real tiny kid
You wish you were me / I wish I was you
Don't you wake up / the dream will come true

and inviting them to participate in a narcissitic fantasy. At other times, she might be offering herself to males--"Now I'm your dream / You're the dream operator"--in order to accomodate

perceived differences in attitude or in "feelings" toward shopping among the members of her audience. The fashion show itself, however, becomes a visual trip through the absurd in which the costumes appear to be designed to check the narcissistic or fetishistic viewing habits of spectators of either sex. Children and adults walk out in shapeless outfits made of fur, grass, leaves, wood, bricks, etc. Byrne's casual remark becomes a *reductio ad absurdum* as the people of Virgil are mesmerized by Kay's salespitch to the point where they are willing to buy, buy, buy.

"Let them hang themselves" partially describes Michael Moore's approach in Roger and Me. Moore's *modus operandi* in his interview with the Convention and Tourism Bureau President of Flint, Michigan is to let the video tape run. The President is clearly not a very good salesman, trying to make the city's new Waterstreet Pavillion sound alluring by describing it as "a lot of glass, and steel, as well as plants, and different colors to make it festive and fun and exciting." The interview sequence lays bare the sacrifice that had had to be made in Flint to construct the Pavillion--"We took a four-square-block area, tore it down"--and Moore underscores the profit motive beneath the Convention and Tourism Bureau President's rhetoric,

It's more than just another building in downtown Flint. I like the color and the excitement of it, and it's very good for tourism in our area--the major stop for bus tours in our area. They can pull up, park the bus, and unload forty senior citizens or so . . . ,

by cutting to a shot of the senior citizens upon whom the man hopes to prey towards the end of his speech.

Whether in the form of a crude expose, ironic commentary, double-voiced discourse, or through the use of lampooning and visual counterpoint, all three of the above films expose the salesmanship beneath the patriotic, economic, and aesthetic arguments typically offered for the mall. Specifically, they (1) identify a new class of mall "controllers," previously absent in the mall films; (2) underscore the profit motive that drives mall developers and owners; and (3) expose the insidiousness with which the consumerist message is filtered to shoppers--through the "zombie effect" of the mall's lulling environment. "Save the city," "give your community something that it can be proud of," "create a new center for your town so that folks can have a chance to get together and hear what each other have to say"--these had been the kinds of justifications that were given for bringing the mall to the community. Yet for the most part, according to its commentators, the city planners only succeeded in dotting the American landscape with consumer monuments, commercial villages, and "ersatz" carnivals dedicated to the proposition that all spenders are not created equal.

Paul Mazursky's Scenes From a Mall (1991) neatly caps the 1980s decade by offering a more thorough carnivalization of the mall marketplace. The film's star, Woody Allen, already occupies a somewhat storied place in Bakhtin criticism because of the

"degrading" use of food¹⁷ and comic use of heteroglossia in his own films¹⁸.

An apt subtitle for Scenes From a Mall would be "a search for private discourse." Allen's character speaks a blend of business talk, promoter's sales talk, and legal advice--and this, only when prompted by his beeper. His tone undergoes little modification as he interrupts his networking to exchange words with his children or with his wife. Bette Midler's character, on the other hand, draws upon the rhetoric of self-help books and marriage counseling in her discourse. Throughout the film, a mime roaming the mall shows how stylized the couple's verbal behavior has become by displaying an ability to instantly copy their gestures, walks, etc.

As in Sleeper (1973), a fool's "redemptive cycle" puts both of these characters back on line. Both take sidetrips through the "lower body stratum" that cause direct speech to rise to the surface. Allen's redemptive cycle begins with a knee to the groin, continues in his sexual exploits in the mall cineplex, and finishes as curses (along with sushi) suddenly vomit out of his mouth. He leaves the Christmas present that he has been dutifully toting all through the mall behind, a bodyboard which is perhaps a symbol of

¹⁷ LeBlanc, Ronald D, "Love and Death and Food: Woody Allen's Comic Use of Gastronomy." LeBlanc discusses how Allen, in both his farces and serious comedies, tends to identify eating/sex as a signifying pair and to continually oppose these to the pair war/death. LeBlanc applies Bakhtin's discussion of folk culture and grotesque realism to show how gastronomy, for Allen, becomes a truly serious, "life-affirming" activity.

¹⁸ Stam, Chapter 6.

his character's commercially catechized body. He then proceeds to run amuck in his mild-mannered way by breaking proprietary rules concerning talking in movie theaters and parking. Midler's transformation scene employs the carnivalesque trope of the hysterical woman "bodying forth" her circumscribed desire. Her character collapses to the ground and then begins to talk in "double-voiced" discourse, breaking into huskier tones as she dreams of "dancing" and self-indulgent spending.

Ultimately the couple achieves a coming together by arguing openly in a crowd, becoming a public spectacle in the mall. Their Punch and Judy sequence climaxes in a literal punch as Allen decks the mime. As their angry speech cools, a new common goal, divorce, permits them an opening for their first real dialogue, which gradually cools into common topoi, talk of their children, and the task of resuming their lives together.

Yet, while it lasts, their argument constitutes a minor folk rebellion of sorts, proving that it is possible to engage in a conversation in the consumer paradise without wholly surrendering to one's beepers and phones. Angry, abusive speech inflects a discourse randomly, in passionate bites; consider Jonson's catalogues or Jimmy Porter's discourse (in John Osborne's Look Back in Anger), which embeds social topoi as its launching points but refuses to stabilize into any pattern. Rather, carnivalesque speech of this kind is marked by its vitality, and references to physical activities (arguing, copulation, swearing). The argument scene in Scenes From a Mall has the effect of

relegating the consumer environment to the background.

The mall itself reflects the trend of homogenization and international expansion of the late 1980s. Its merchant profile presents us with a dumping ground of cultural stereotypes for sale--we are bombarded with English Christmas carols, an Indian movie, a Japanese sushi bar, a French restaurant, Mexican mariachi bands, etc. The very institutionalization and commercial circulation of popular forms and stereotypes like these create an environment where thinking and talk is stale. But, we might ask, to whom does a "popular" stereotype belong when it has become so widely distributed and thoroughly commodified? Here, as in other Allen films, the rule seems to be that if the shoe fits, it isn't the right one. Allen, by trade, is a mimicker of stylized language and behavior as well as of intellectual systems (such as Freudian psychoanalysis) that describe human phenomena "so right" as to rarely be tested against living examples. Scenes From a Mall may, in one sense, be viewed as the apotheosis of the mall because of its institutionalization of popular beliefs and values (which is, at times, hard to watch). Yet at the same time, this formal rendering of the "religion of consumerism" points to its fundamental "divorce" from human experience.

The Next Generation

"And the children do the shopping . . . "

--Kay Culver in True Stories

By Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989), the shopping mall film has become "historicized" within the teen films. In it, two teenagers give their celebrity guests from the past a mini-lecture on the mall's importance to today's society and then release them for an hour or so in a megamall (Metrocenter in Tempe, Arizona) to learn all they can about our world.

It seems like this would be a slightly different proposition in the 1990s than it once may have been, however. In this essay, I have shown that the early films introduce and colonize a new territory for teens that becomes thoroughly domesticated by the middle of the decade. But as the end of the decade drew near, Hollywood's identification of the shopping mall as the territory of the high school "rat" was not as common.¹⁹

One cause for this has been traced to the recession of the late 70's that made department store malls less economical to build and helped to reinstate the "pedestrian integrity" of glass-roofed, narrower arcades (Maitland 38-42); in other words, less "fantasy world" malls could be built of the type that had been "seized" by teens or had inspired critics to their visions of social distopia. Mall literature is still marked by descriptions of the new services offered in individual centers across the country (and now internationally), but the hot new trends of automalls and mallwalking have hardly, as yet, fulfilled the grim promise of Kowinski's "To live and die in the mall" expansion of services

¹⁹ Perhaps more premonitory of the 1990s is a scene in which Bill (Alex Winter) hands money to his younger brother Deacon to escort "Napoleon" for the day.

scenario.

A more direct cause for the marginalization of the subculture may be traced to the shifting trends in demographics following the end of the baby boom. The decreasing proportion of teens in the population has prompted mall managers to refocus their sights upon older shoppers. This new target group possesses half of the disposable income in the United States, and has been said to favor "comfort, security, convenience, recognition, and socialization" over excitement (Turchiano 36). Since many of today's shoppers have younger children and grandchildren in tow, malls have begun to offer daycare and childcare services, theatres, Camp Snoopys, and Kiddie Jungles. The family and the 14-and-under crowd have firmly moved in and are in the process of becoming the mall's new consumer-citizens.²⁰ As advertisers target increasingly younger groups of consumers with new-found "discretionary incomes," social analysts may again find themselves posing the kind of questions about these kids that Kowinski raised in the mid-1980s.

The history of Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure serves as a good illustration of the way a younger generation of kids is being handed the consumerist torch. Originally packaged for teens, the film succeeded in reaching a younger audience as well, and is now seen on Saturday mornings as a cartoon alongside the Valley-

²⁰ Significantly, there appears to be a corresponding trend in the movies to represent mall shoppers as either younger children or adults. Consider 1990's Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (a funny-thing-happened-on-the-way-to-the-mall film) or Kindergarten Cop (which features a long mall sequence) on the one hand; Scenes From a Mall (1991) on the other.

speaking Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and "Yo, Yogi!." The latter is an updating of the "Yogi Bear" cartoon featuring younger versions of the characters who live and work in "Jellystone Mall." My copy of the Bill and Ted video was introduced by a Cheerios commercial featuring kids on skateboards, a "Cheerios Presents" profile of a youngster who helps out the homeless in his neighborhood, and an ad for "Bill & Ted's Watch & Win Trivia Game." The ad explained the game and mentioned the 1-900 number of a "Bureau of Massive Brain Usage" along with the instructions for kids to phone in their answers to questions (with their parent's permission, of course). The advertisers further hope to lure younger consumers with prizes that include Bill and Ted t-shirts, a new skateboard, even a trip to Paris. Perhaps, if ad campaigns like this one succeed, there will be cause, in the not too distant future, to speak of "hurried kids," "the shopping mall junior high," or even "the shopping mall grade school."²¹

**Envoi: On Patterns of Colonization
and Carnivalization**

The representation of a shared place or "hangout" in teen films is more the rule than a novelty, of course. Teen groups

²¹ Another splendid example of the way mall consumerism has been extended and is being "taught" to a lower age group is Milton Bradley's 1989 game "Mall Madness," designed for players ages 9 and up. The game includes a scale model of a department store mall and a central speaker, or "Voice of the Mall," located in the atrium. The Voice of the Mall instructs kids where to go for sales. Each player is given a bank card to be "run through" when they need more cash or wish to make a purchase.

had previously gathered on beaches, in cars, and in diners in the movies before the shopping mall came into vogue, although from Kowinski's description of the mall, it appears that the shopping mall may have been the first place to "have everything" that could sustain a community's material needs. Likewise, "Valley talk," still with us, is phenomenologically nothing very new; teenagers have for decades spoken their own patois, from 1960s psychedelia to 1970s ghetto chic. Indeed, the commercial "values" and "dreams" of teen subcultures of the 1980s also seem more reactionary than revolutionary. The general outlook of an Alex Keaton (Michael J. Fox's character on Family Ties) compares fairly closely with Andy Hardy's, for example, for its consumerism, sexism, and jingoism.

The replication that we can observe in behavioral patterns brings up the question of recurring patterns in our culture's organization and utilization of space. If the 1960s truly were beholden to the 30s for many of its artistic resources and topoi, and the 80s to the 40s, we might consider whether the same kinds of social forces may have been at work, throughout different eras, in the redlining of suburbs, in the fencing off of ghetto districts, or in the creation of escapist consumer paradises. Furthermore, we might further investigate the social conditions under which macro-patterns such as crowding, dispersal, hierarchical division, and reallocation of resources occur. This appears to be one promising line of intersection between rhetorical studies of film and cultural anthropology.

Secondly, we may need to take into account patterns

of colonization and upheaval within decades. Dawn of the Dead (1979) and The Blues Brothers (1981) crashed into the shopping mall as a refuge from the troubled city of the 1970s, injecting into the movies the discourse of city planners who had envisioned malls as the solution to urban economic woes. Scenes from a Mall, in 1991, appears to be an anchor at the other end of the commercial 1980s. As we have seen, the tone taken by the films of the decade shifts from hushed appreciation of the "consumer paradise" and almost reverent colonization, to stylization and ironization, to gleeful destruction and carnivalesque degradation. This pattern appears to recur in other decades as well.

Consider the lost "innocence" of the river that a broad survey of the decades yields--Night of the Hunter and Picnic (1955), Deliverance (1972), River's Edge (1987). Consider the small towns shot up and painted red in the Westerns in the late 40s--early 50s, the domestic space infected by the Hitchcocks and Pinters in the late 50s--early 60s, and the hauntings that transformed the suburban "dream home" into the site of hysterical horror movie outbursts. Or consider how the 1960s highway of adventure and peaceful self-discovery gets sidetracked in violence in Bonnie and Clyde or Easy Rider. The result seems to be not an end of decade dismissal, but rather, to use Bakhtin's term, a degradation, a gradual subordination of the shrillest visions of the city and suburban planners to our lifestyle. The public space is tested, evaluated, and thrown into relief against a network of vital activity. What has been overexposed to the life of the

community at large is gradually decentered in the Hollywood vision. The shopping mall becomes, once again, a place to shop--when one has the money.

More removed mysteries to consider as we continue to define film decades and patterns of cultural upheaval include the possible role of the road as "transitional" genre between decades of American film. In 1960s films, the road is a dominant trope, with the traveling bands' stops on tour constituting beckoning advertisements for a lifestyle as well--the Beatle films, Monterey Pop (1967), Woodstock (1970), Gimme Shelter (1970). But in between the decades, the road may also serve a transitional or prelude function, with recent films such as Rainman, Wild at Heart, Thelma and Louise, or My Own Private Idaho (1989-1991) beginning to transport us beyond our consumer worlds--to someplace else.

Environmental issues began to reappear in newspaper headlines in 1989, from the Garbage Scow to the Exxon Valdez, to border-crossing environmental issues (acid rain, ozone depletion), to natural disasters such as the earthquake at the World Series in San Francisco, Hurricane Hugo, etc. Hollywood has responded by bringing the earth closer to us in ecodramas such as 1990's Dances With Wolves, 1991's Robin Hood, Grand Canyon, etc. In the meantime, the economic recession (along with presidential appeals to shop at the mall that have gone unheeded) are calling a realist aesthetics into being. We are currently experiencing a move toward realism in its simplest form, as Hollywood takes the antithesis of its own 1980s formulas and pronounces death upon the 1980s yuppie

in 1991 films such as Regarding Henry, The Doctor, Doc Hollywood, and Other People's Money. For the time being, we remain a decade "under erasure."

Another trend is towards stories retold from new perspectives: Dances with Wolves, 1991's JFK and Bugsy, feminist road films and westerns (e.g. Thelma and Louise, Thousand Pieces of Gold), gay subculture studies (Paris is Burning, My Own Private Idaho), and the work of Spike Lee, John Singleton and other young African-American filmmakers. It must be remembered, however, how quickly Hollywood's "visions" have reverted to the monocular and become the projection of the dominant social group's views of the world, always generalized and flattened out by the studios in order to sell. As we move into the 1990s, perhaps the best that can be hoped for is that Hollywood visions of community, in keeping with the new perspectives emerging in our changing culture, will remain more dialogic.

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